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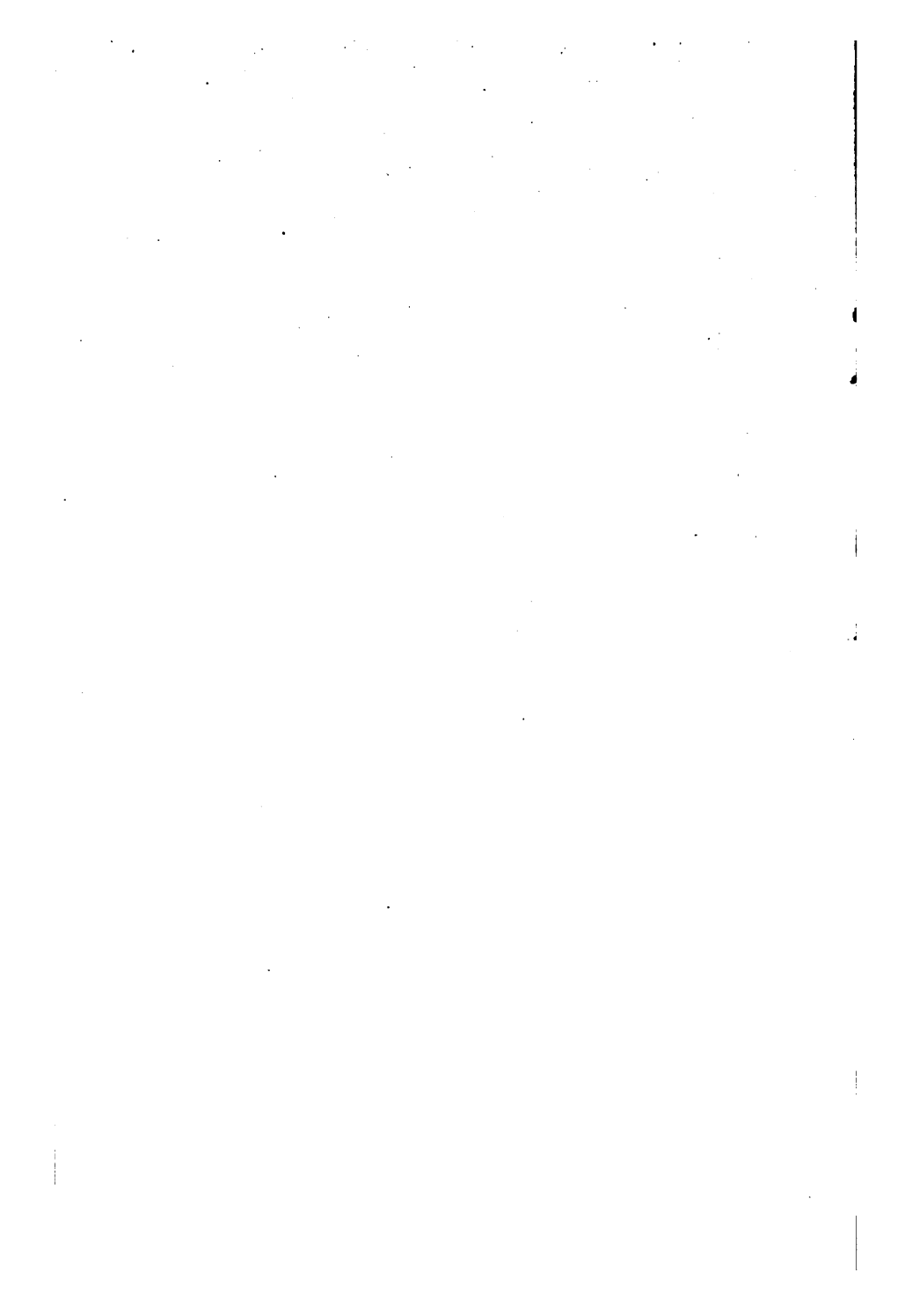
Poetry (American)

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THE LOVER'S ROSARY

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The Lover's Rosary

By
Samuel Brookes More



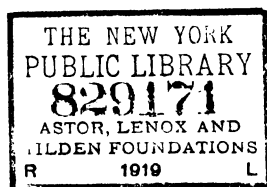
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1918

M. Smith



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ANY VON
JULY
1918

To
The Dear Inspiration Departed

THE LOVER'S APOLOGY

There is a pleasure in reading that which expresses beautiful thoughts in plain and unadorned language; and there is a pleasure in that which is lovely and beautiful but expressed in symbols—although the shadowed meanings may at first baffle the reader.

Is it not the poet's business to record the desires of the heart as well as the calculations of the mind? When Life turns its kaleidoscope, contrasting shapes and colours unite in harmonious designs; and so, the apparent contradictions of the mind and heart may be combined to form a completed destiny.

If I have offered anything of beauty, let it not be denied for the sorrow that is found in truth.

A chain of beads, used for counting prayers, may be called a "Rosary," but such a string, or chain, is more correctly named a "Chaplet." A Chaplet is composed of fifty-nine beads; and when the devotee has told the fifty-nine beads three times, he has thereby completed a "Rosary." My dear reader, when you have the third time read this chain of sonnets, fifty-nine, you will have completed "The Lover's Rosary." And, as the beads are often made of precious jewels, let us hope some pearls may be found: alas, I fear many are fashioned of ashes.

The curious reader may discover the method of rhymes by which the sonnets are linked together.

PART I
PEARLS

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

PEARLS

I

How often have I wandered by some stream,
That laughing bubbled on its joyful way,
And absent-minded, while my mind was fay,
Forgot the world to revel in a dream:—

The splendid sun that makes the ripples gleam,
The quivering birds, sweet-singing all the day,
The velvet banks, anon with blossoms gay,
All these the ground-work of my dreaming, seem

Transfigured from mortality to things
Surpassing heaven. Such a wight, bewitched,
I revel in a world of phantasy.—

For you, my love, let Fancy preen her wings,
And like a doting miser, thrice enriched,
Surround me with your golden memory:—

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

II

While one day strolling through a factory,
I saw a great machine, some genius made,
As busily it wove a rich brocade
Of silken texture; and it seemed to me,

While watching it, absorbed in revery,
A mist descended, or a silent shade
Surrounded, or an unseen spirit laid
A veil upon it.— Quickly and silently

The turning wheels and clicking needles change
To noiseless forms that as they swiftly move
Weave a strange fabric of my destiny:—

The patterns on the mystic warp arrange
In characters that prophecy our love,
Though recent, ends not with eternity.

III

Far from its crag that beetles o'er the sea,
A mere speck in the sky, an eagle sails—
Slowly fading—and while my sight avails,
A sense of desolation weighs on me.

But soon upon the wings of Revery
My spirit follows as my vision fails;
And careless of the time or adverse gales,
Floats with the bird through skies of phantasy.

Unhappy omen! — When I talked with you
A sense of apprehension weighed me down,
That your sweet spirit from my gaze might float!

Far as my free thought to that eagle flew
Oh, let me follow — if my love has flown —
Follow to worlds etherial and remote!

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

IV

Gold is the aged miser's antidote
For all the ills of poor humanity;
But while he fondles that insanity,
His life escapes him as a drifting boat:

Brave in his words, the lozel loves to quote
A witless jargon of profanity —
Gathered from comrades of like vanity —
But at the last as thorns they vex his throat:

Believe me, dearest, rich with golden speech,
You, the sweet miser of Love's flattery,
Are drifting slowly from the life you prize:

Not like the lozel — I must now beseech
You swear not "No" when "Yes" your oath
should be; —
From a small word the poisoned arrow flies.

V

Kisses and kind words, tears and woful sighs,
Anger and petulance, sweet winning ways,
Fretful or radiant as unsettled days
When storm and sunshine lurk in fickle skies;

Silly with wisdom or with nonsense wise,
Worthy of motley or immortal bays,—
Your whims divert me:— but one virtue stays
Unchanged within you, as the gem defies

Dissolving ocean and corroding years;
In this you change not; true as tempered steel
That bent or twisted straightens when released;

Let him you've yielded love forget his fears,
For loyal to the passion that you feel,
Your love, once given, always is increased.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

VI

Whether a sordid passion or a feast
Of soul and reason is the greater joy
May be debated. Let who will destroy
His better self and wallow as the beast

In pleasures earthly, long I've ceased
To think of love that as a base alloy
Depends upon the touch of flesh. The toy
That pleases with its tinsel is the least

Enjoyed when once its fraud is realized —
And yet there is a radiance of the mind
That shines forth from the person that we love,

By which the body is idealized:—
Your beauty has so dazzled me that blind
To every reason I can nothing prove.

VII

All things of beauty were designed for love —
Our hearts delight in many-tinted flowers,
Nodding in nooks and water-circled bowers, —
Haunt of the wild fowl and the timid dove;—

The deep cool lake, the wide sky swung above,
Beautiful both, if blue or gray with showers; —
The white clouds, menaced by tall city towers,
Or Godly spires that point where angels move:—

All these our souls delight to dote upon,
And others many, but of things most fair
The beauty of a maid surpasses all:

And, since of these by far the loveliest one,
If you are not love's pattern, I will swear
That Nature's ways are never natural.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

VIII

How sweet when nearly waking, dreams recall
The image of a dear and absent friend; —
The sleeper, fondly struggling not to end
His drowsy passion, still imagines all

More beautiful than life. A willing thrall
Of empty visions, he will even lend
Himself to conscious error, and extend
The flight of time, if he may longer loll

In stolen rapture. — As the sleeper's trance
Your image is before my swimming eyes,
Awake or sleeping, always — everywhere:

But not a soulless, pictured radiance
Of you — only your presence satisfies —
I'd rather awake and see you standing there.

IX

Dreaming of things not earthly and most rare,
Angelic forms are pictured in the mind,
While, to the loveliness around us blind,
Our vision feeds on phantoms of the air:

All those outlines of vacancy compare
With counterparts on earth, that we might find
In humble circumstances, loved, enshrined
And worshiped, though we pass them unaware.

How often have I pictured you in dreams,
As some celestial spirit, not of earth,
And dreamed my love was what I deified:

But now, you only loving, that which seems
Of fancy is forsaken. — Your true worth
In truth sufficient, — I am satisfied.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

X

'T was only yesterday that you denied
All love for me, and spitefully maintained
You hated and despised me; whether feigned
Or truthful I was helpless to decide:

But now you smile and flutter by my side,
And love is in your glances: whether trained
A flirt you play me thus, or whether pained
With slight excuse you pouted, I'll not chide,

Nor criticise; because, in spite of all
Your contradictions and caprices, I
Am confident that I have read your heart:

Although you strive against me, I recall
A thousand actions that have certainly
Declared the truth your lips will not impart.

PEARLS

XI

If poetry is the text-book of the heart,
Then I should conquer the strong citadel
That you have battled for so long and well
With all your batteries of guile and art:

Soon as my love had gained a feeble start,
I fed my fancy, — silent in my cell, —
On all romances that the poets tell
Of Venus and the trick of Cupid's dart.

Alack, your will has woven such a spell,
That, sitting with you, I forget the way
Pursued by lovers, fabled of old time;

And so, rejecting their example, dwell
Upon the manner of the present day, —
That shows true love in action, not in rhyme.

XII

Keen as the bloodhound, man imagines crime
In actions that are plainly innocent:
He seizes on a false clue, and intent
Upon his victim overlooks the prime

Necessities of circumstance and time
And proper motive, even to invent
Unheard of causes for things never meant, —
Riveting chains from deeds almost sublime.

But I, poor dolt, must follow a false trail
More silly than the wonder-finding sleuth, —
Who rather than his thief should fleck the bars, —

For every time you flout at me I fail
To guess your purposed fraud;—always the truth
Shines from your eyes as purity from stars.

XIII

Love is an ancient subject, and the stars
In lovers' themes have always been the same;
But ever since that mischief-maker came,
To shoot promiscuous arrows in soft wars,

The old, old story nothing ever bars; —
The telling of it is a world-old game; —
Perhaps the Heavens, that provide the flame,
Unite with Love, as Venus shines with Mars.

Proud of my art, I purposed not to shame
These pages, writing sonnets with those two
Mingled to form a subject, old and trite;

But, whether it is wrong or not to blame
My love on lunacy, the stars and you
Are always present in my dazzled sight.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

XIV

Do you remember, just the other night,
When, happy, I was sitting at your feet,
A sudden sickness seized me, as the heat
Of summer suns may strike with blinding light?

Pale as the pale moon, in a hasty fright,
Arising from your crimson-cushioned seat,
You brought me red wine, saying,
"Drink it, Sweet:"
And as I took it I could see the white

Reflection of a crescent in the wine, —
Like silver in a wave of burning gold, —
Diana imaged by the chaliced vine:

Can you believe that omen was a sign,
That like Diana, beautiful and cold,
Your heart may love but never will be mine?

XV

You seem so fickle, but a hallowed shrine
Is hidden in your bosom, which you guard
With such a jealous care, that no reward,
Nor penalty, nor subtly planned design

Can overcome it. — Nothing so divine —
Not even the lily, white and yet unscarred,
And not the richest aromatic nard,
Nor brilliant crystal from Brazilian mine,

Are equal to enhance its purity,
Or lend it ornament. It is because
You worship in that temple I have failed:

Although I've proved your passion, certainly,
Yet as the vestal of that fane you pause,
And check the love that surely has prevailed.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

XVI

Silent as a spirit a white cloud sailed
Alone across the bluest summer sky;
And as I gazed upon it floating by,
It seemed a weeping angel, robed and veiled:

For I could quite discern her features, paled
And tear-wet, as she witnessed from her high
Estate the woes for which the world must sigh,
Condemned for sins long ages have entailed:

And imaged in a dark pool at my feet,
That same cloud seemed an evil witch,
With angry scowl determined on my ill:

But this astonished me; — the angel, sweet
In the blue sky, and the dark face in the ditch,
Both had your features — explain it if you will.

XVII

If you should spy Amanga on her hill,
In wilding arbour, where sweet eglantine,
Or wandering ivy, tangles with its vine
Love-garlands, dipping to the glassy rill;

The rill that murmurs to the whip-poor-will,
His cadence blending where the mountain pine
Tinctures the breeze with aromatic wine —
Delicious juices secret gnomes distil; —

If you should see her, hidden in that bower,
Spreading her nympholepsies of desire —
A love-god dreaming — how could you deny

Your breast to garden love's devoted flower,
That sheds a new life, — as the lotus fire
In mind and heart — immortal though we die?

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

XVIII

Midnight with her most starry canopy

Concealed you in purple as you sat beneath
The green magnolia, weaving a love-wreath
Of flowers, — gathered when the moon was high.

I saw you not, nor even heard you sigh,

Unconscious, sweeter than Aurora's breath,
At dawn that steals across the dripping heath
From the far mountains, and their mystery:

But there you waited in the screening shade,

While I passed by you through the mossy vale,
Absorbed, and musing on my cherished dream;

For I would woo you in a serenade,

From slumbers gentle to awake and sail
Beneath the stars upon a tranquil stream:—

XIX

Awake, awake! arise from thy dream!

A splendour envelops the wave and the vale,
Down by the banks of the Pond-lily Stream.

Come hither, come hither! the late moonbeam
Has silvered the tree-tops that circle the dale,
Down by the banks of the Pond-lily Stream.

A shallop is waiting in waters that gleam
With thousands of stars, and the moon-light pale,
Down by the banks of the Pond-lily Stream.

Oh! light as the fairies that trip in thy dream,
Oh, swiftly and lightly the shallop will sail,
Down by the banks of the Pond-lily Stream—

Come hither, come hither! the wave and the vale
Are spangled with stars and the moon-light pale!

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

XX

Why should the plaintive voice of love prevail
When silently the hosts of heaven in bright
Procession move, — great armies of the night, —
A time and tide when love may hardly fail?

Why should the love-call of the nightingale
Sound dearest in the slowly fading light, —
The shadows rising with his upward flight,
The sun declining in a misty veil?

The last note of my serenade was husht,
But no white hand undid your casement bars, —
And not a sound disturbed your hallowed shrine:

But as I turned to go a footstep crusht
The soft turf at my side, and like the stars
That witnessed it, your eyes were seeking mine.

XXI

As when some precious vintage of old wine
Excites the spirit to its utmost pitch
Of exaltation, marvelously rich
Chimeras and absurdities combine

And form illusions, heavenly, divine; —
So passionate elixirs may bewitch
The brain to conjure up delusions, which
No brush can rival and no touch refine.

When I am with you, every nerve afire
And tingling with excitement, I am lost
To reason and I crown you with perfection;

But when I leave you, — as the stars expire
In the gray dawn, or as flames die in the frost, —
The heat of passion yields to cold reflection.

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XXIII

Angling one day in waters clear as glass
I watched the silly fishes 'round the bait,
Circle and nibble, witless of their fate,
Until the boldest, an audacious bass,

Snapped at the sharp hook. Quickly on the grass
I landed him. — Stooping to estimate
His value and to guess his goodly weight,
My brain went dizzy. — If the soul should pass

Forth from the living body, and should wish
A life for both the spirit and the clay,
'Twould not be more surprising — I could see

Myself transformed into a silly fish;
And while I sported in a tranquil bay,
You smiled and fixed a baited hook for me.

XXIV

If you consider it you will agree
To this conclusion. — Multitudes believe
Their hearts are honest, though their lips deceive
Themselves and others. Many a fallacy

Is cherished only to bolster what must be
False to the core; for those who fear and grieve
Will clutch at gossamers, hoping to relieve
Their everlasting doom. — Ah, what can we

Depend upon! If fraud, so prevalent,
Makes virtue of necessitous deceit,
Must we, too, sacrifice the truth for guile?

Forget experience, and be confident
An honest love is truthful. It is sweet
To know the one you love is never vile.

XXV

Before we loved, you greeted with a smile
Whenever you might meet me on the street;
And you were always lovable and sweet,
Considerate and kind, and free from guile:

And so the habit gained on me to while
Away my evenings, sitting at your feet;
And you with pretty ways contrived to cheat
The measured hours. — How can we reconcile

Those days of quiet friendship, so replete
With pure affection, to the present strife
That seems to flourish as our love increases?

Love must engender madness from its heat;
Or, shall we say, because it mingles life
A two-fold vigour double fire releases?

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

XXVI

Why should we grieve that love with age decreases?

'Tis easy to believe love lives forever —

There is no logic clear enough to sever

Such contradictions from the simplest theses.

Even while I'm certain that your love increases,

Your life is stricken with a wasting fever;

And what I hold should die not, Death will never

Permit to live. — Alas, that virtue ceases!

Let me recite my love — a rosary —

Sweet thoughts of you in symbols, as on beads

That hint of thrice five sacred mysteries.

'Tis all that's left; the future flies from me;—

The present moment gone, to nothing leads;—

And life is but the sum of memories.

XXVII

Dreamily playing on the ivory keys,
While slowly the dim twilight seeks the west,
A subtle feeling seems to haunt my breast
That you are mingling in those harmonies:—

Strains from old masters, fitting melodies,
Sweeter than if an angel's hand caressed
His own loved instrument, now float and rest
Around me: — Ah, my wondering spirit sees

Forms not of earth: — as keenest eyes, possessed
In youth, when slumber has renewed their power
Search in the dawn for blossoms fresh with dew;—

Whether those forms exist as spirits blest
With life, I know not, but the very flower
Of life and beauty must remain with you.

XXVIII

Inform my spirit what is really true,
Ye winging habitants of yielding air!
Are ye surrounding us, and everywhere
Instinct with life, beneath the utmost blue?

Or is it all a fiction, always new
Because our sad wits need it to repair
The ravage of destruction, that we dare
To conjure shapes our eyes may never view?

Now that I cannot see your lovely face,
Each evening when the glorious day-light fails,
My soul is rapt in silent reveries:

As if enchanted, I can see and trace
In sunset splendours —where the thin rack trails
In waves of beryl — sailing argosies.

XXIX

O amber ships afloat on beryl seas —
With all your silken sails a-spread for gales
That bear you swiftly from our saddened vales
To happy islands, — isles that mysteries

Which now perplex us, — sorrow, death, disease,
May never burden, — trim, oh trim your sails!
Hasten from this dark planet where the wails
Of stricken spirits pall on every breeze!

Take with you all that joyful is and blest;
Leave us no mingling of the true and pure —
Envy to temper; and malicious spite —

For oh, already from our midst the best,
The purest, truest, to your haven obscure,
Careens through ether on her wings of light!

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

XXX

Oh, sacred pledges hidden from the sight
Of alien eyes, recorded dimly here
In shadowy symbols! Words that charm the ear
And haunting visions of the secret night,

Sealed to the curious, yield refined delight,
Elusive and discreet, obscurely clear!—
Ah, never perish from this book the dear
Allusions she will understand aright!

I feel her presence as I turn these pages —
And the rich treasure, borne in amber ships
Across etherial seas to shores distressing,

From her Elysium my soul engages —
It seems I hear the murmur of her lips
Denying what her kind eyes are confessing.

XXXI

She moved upon this earth a joy and blessing;
The wild dove knew her voice, and every flower
That blossomed in the forest knew the hour
When she should pass it by — a witch-like
guessing.

The fragrant violet, for her caressing,
Lifted its head in cool sequestered bower,
And many a bloom, from foot of mossy tower,
Envied the turf her gentle foot was pressing.

Oh, never more will timid homing swallows
Wheel round her as she comes back flower laden,
From spangled meadows by the brooklet-
shallows!

But still I love to think in some Dream-Aiden
She wanders—happy where the day is long —
Where swift time lingers for the joy of song.

PART II
ASHES

ASHES

XXXII

Now to the world comes one in earnest song,
With stylus saddened, dipped in blood and tears,
Shed by those heroes of forgotten years,
Now veiled in glooms, a silent shadow-throng.—

Their deeds of glory tarnished in the long
Sweep of dark ages, lo, the sad world nears
Deeper eclipse — fleet-footed Future bears
From shadow-voids, to whelm the great and
strong.

Alas, the doomed world may dissolve in space,
But never should the truth of love be lost,
Nor elemental passion be forgot.

Oh let my spirit fabled paths retrace,
And recreate that dim etherial host,
In forms immortal, that they perish not. —

XXXIII

Into the void of death old Chronus tost
Essential Deities, now long forgot;
Into the shadows, whither we know not,
But dead to us and to the future lost:

If they, immortal, shriveled in the frost
Of Time's advancing touch, what counterplot
May finite beings frame, to change one jot
The issue of a final holocaust?

The proud old oak-tree fades before our eyes,
And, hidden in the silent wilderness,
Ancestral granite may dissolve in woe:

Inhaling for its life the body dies;
And he who pleads immortal Powers to bless
A future date — forgets a mortal foe.

XXXIV

In what dim antres of Forgetfulness
Are lingering the Gods of long ago,
Who, laughter-loving, mingled in the flow
Of mortal tears and human wretchedness?

Joyous they moved through avenues of distress,
And bathed the dark ways in a heavenly glow
Of light and reason, that the earth below
Might something of immortal hope possess.

No more among us, all their attributes are blent
In One Omnipotent, that dwelleth far
Beyond the knowledge of the finite mind:

And the sweet peace, that hallowed worship lent,
Is fast receding, as a fading star
Whose feeble virtue — few may seek or find.

XXXV

O happy cherub, leaning o'er the bar
That separates the City of the Blest,
Secure from caverns where lost souls, distressed,
Haunt the sad hollows of a darkened star, —

Shalt thou not sorrow that such beings are
Doomed always there to wander without rest —
Weeping, with their own wickedness possess —
Barred from thy love, from thy kind pity far?

Behold, our hearts from our unhappy state,
In this unstable world of suffering,
Conceive like sorrows for the stars unknown; —

But, O kind angel! see our equal fate,
Where Fate flies drunken on unguided wing;
A bane to blight us—till the soul has flown.

XXXVI

What pensive spirit, poised on drooping wing,
Has ever ventured from his ghostly vale,
Through yielding ether and the moonlight pale,
That hither a true message he may bring?

No more the prophet's cries are quickening
The multitudes, and miracles now fail
To overcome the doubters that assail
The blessed altars where the faithful cling:

If, then, our hallowed faith is but a dream,
And the world welters in a whirl of chance,
Why should we sorrow while endowed with
breath?

For, whether wise or merry, it would seem
The ways are tangled as an opiate's trance, —
Till the strange riddle — has been solved by
death.

XXXVII

Then let desire to sordid ways advance,
And, having cast aside unreasoned hope,
We may proceed with unchecked force to cope,
Victorious, in the Tournament of Chance:

For what avails it if we break a lance
For truth and glory, and defeated grope,
Unaided, down oblivion's fatal slope
As the spent ghost of Bayard, slain for France?—

Such was the folly of that peerless soul,
He dared not tarnish his escutcheon's flower
To gain great glory by one action wrong!

Oh, fatal argument for either goal:
Choose brutal force and swagger out an hour,
Or, swayed by visions, — die to grace a song!

XXXVIII

Oh, for the tincture of an opiate-flower,
With triple virtue, and a dream profound
In a wide solitude where not a sound
May vex to motion a suspended hour:

Never to waken from the gentle power
Of living sleep, but like a dreamer drowned
In popped slumber, to renew a round
Of visionary joys in Morpheus' bower!

By some smooth alchemy, unthought of yet,
To mingle in one essence life and death,
And float in ecstasy betwixt extremes!—

A vain delusion; what can void the debt
Our dust assumed, when vivified with breath
It pledged a long extinction—for short dreams.

XXXIX

To bless or ban thee, O destroying Death,
Remains a riddle with no answer found;
For whether it were better to be bound
Forever to this clay with living breath,

Or let the spirit forth, where wandereth
In vacant vistas, — void of light and sound, —
Unshapen, immaterial forms around
Dim nebulae, above or underneath:

Ah, that may put our courage to the touch,
May breed up dreadful doubts; dismay the heart
Most callous to the outcome of its doom: —

Sleep or oblivion, aught or naught, is much
Beyond the limit wisdom may impart; —
And silence is our witness — from the tomb.

XL

The occult Magian, versed in subtle art,
Intent on solving hidden mysteries,
Nightly observes the slowly moving skies,
Obscurely shadowed on his ancient chart:

All his quaint patterns of the stars impart
Disputed knowledge; when a monarch dies,
Or deeds of honour to enhance the wise,
Rich in their pride, before their souls depart:

But we, consulting those celestial signs,
Can only wonder where the spirits dwell, —
Long vanished from this world, for weal or woe;—

And, wonder as we may, the mind declines
To answer, whether heaven, or sleep, or hell; —
Our dreams must satisfy — until we go.

XLI

Secluded from his kind in silent cell,
Through the long cycles of uncounted years,
The anchorite in mental vision rears
A paradise to balance real hell:

Deep gloom is wrapt around his heart to quell
Each healthful impulse of his nature; tears
And laughter, love and hope, and even fears,
That rouse up to endeavour, never swell

His deadened pulse, — never stir his heart:
But while his precious days in dreams are lost,
A fateful spectre hovers at his side;

Adds up each hour, with an accountant's art; —
Alas, despising time's enormous cost,
His life is death — before his flesh has died.

XLII

The bark sails for a moment and is tossed
By the rough winds into eternity;
And the mild autumn breezes presently
Must vanish for the winter's killing frost:

But like the brave sport who has staked and lost,
With only smiles for his adversity,
Let us play hazard on a changing sea,
And chance a wreck, no matter what the cost:

For brief the tally of our days ordained,
When we were ushered in this world of tears
By the slant twist of fickle Fortune's wheel:

And every action is a moment gained,
An added motion to the moving reel
That pictures life — as the dark ending nears.

XLIII

Consider not the substance that we feel,
But bid Imagination stretch her wand,
That from mysterious voids a phantom land
Of woven thoughts her magic may reveal;

For the racked world, hurled as a crooked wheel,
Far through the sky by some Titanic hand,
Escapes this pitfall, or that stormy strand,
Only to vanish — it is nothing real:

And, therefore, to abide where silent Thought,
Eternal by Enchantment's soft control,
Broods in an aery palace of her own,

Is better, more substantial joy, than aught,
Supposed of substance, that deludes the soul
To sensual pleasures,—mortal when they're
known.

XLIV

When the soft tones of a great anthem roll
And quiver in the air — delicious pain —
Our morbid pulse beats with the sad refrain,
Giving a strange joy to the wakened soul:

And when we listen to the muffled toll
Of slow bells, warning us with solemn strain
What futile ends our labours may attain,
We look through dark death to a brighter goal.

Ah, why should discord lead to harmony,
Or why should sorrow sweetest joy entwine,
Or why should darkness lead us to the light?

Our reason staggers at the wrongs we see; —
Surely, our souls must quaff ethereal wine
To pluck eternal day — from an eternal night.

XLV

Oh, let us top our glasses with red wine
And drown in folly sober-vested Care;
Ho, all ye wise men! let us motley wear
And gaily habit with the surfeit swine:

For where goes wisdom, if we hew the line
And listen to her words that only bear
Us ever deeper in a deep despair,
Where not the feeblest ray of light may shine?

Crown only joyful clowns with classic bays,
And worship Folly in the world's wide fane;
Greet with light laughter either feast or crust:

Toils of a life-time for a puff of praise,
That flits tomorrow, is but labour vain —
The weak and strong — dissolve in equal dust.

XLVI

Alas, if man is only born to drain
 A cup of sorrow, measured to the brim,
 Why should he drown his anguish in a dim
 Belief that present woe is future gain?

What law, or logic, may convince his brain
 How foolish are the hopes that dazzle him?
 Rather than know his doom, he will not trim
 One feeble ray that shows his hopes are vain.

But if shrewd wisdom has increased our woe,
 Let us forget our sorrows while we dote
 On graceful birds, on all sweet flowers that
 bloom,

And on the moon and stars that come and go,
 And doves, white winged, that on the warm air
 float, —
 Ah, why should they be subject to our doom?

XLVII

O sacred Forest of an age remote!

The little birds, that hover in thy trees,
Tune their unchanged immortal melodies
To Nature's voice that in thy realm doth float.

And even the speckled toad, ordained to dote
Upon the silent Moon, from squatting knees
Peers upward, out of boggy pools, and sees
Her guiding through the skies her silver boat.

Alas, each day the cruel hunter sights
His scientific tubes to slaughter all, —
That silence may succeed the sound of song:

But on the slippery toad his heel alights,
While hunting luckless victims, and his fall
Gives him to Death — that all may suffer wrong.

XLVIII

Know ye the green hills whence the brooklets brawl
Down to the valleys, where the lion's lair,
The leopard's den and the serpent's path declare
How bounteous Nature may provide for all?

Know ye the valleys where the lilies loll, —
The sleepy hollows where the poppies flare
Vermillion splendours in the golden glare
Of glowing sunsets, — where the ripe fruits fall

From hanging branches on huge crocodiles, —
Where drowsily sprawling on the sun-struck rock
The lazy lizzard blinks his beedy eyes?

Oh, always on her children Nature smiles!
Smiles on the wicked, smiles as if to mock
That rogues may fatten — when a victim dies.

XLIX

Here, from the rose-bush to this hollyhock,
The wily insect has prepared her net,
Invisible, fine, sparkling with the wet
Round jewels of the dawn, as if to mock

The fairy fringes of Titania's frock; —
No hapless victim has been tempted yet
To test that tangle, or approached to fret
The blossoms, tempting on their thorny stalk:

But when the gay-moth flaunts a damask wing, —
Hunting for honey or an amorous mate, —
Her gauzy pinions, as they touch a thread,

Rouse the fierce ogress from her lair to spring
Swift as a tiger. — Oh, disastrous fate,
That fraud should live — when innocence is dead!

L

Enraptured, as he sees through Heaven's gate,
With wonders of that other world possest,
The Praying Mantis, his long arms addrest
In adoration, seems to supplicate

God's blessing; but ferocity, innate,
Lurks hidden in his hypocritic breast:
Oh, what a universe! — a devil's jest
Where savage guile for innocence may wait:

Good saints above! now let us laugh, the while
We have our chuckle at old Satan's glee;
For, even as the insect seems to pray,

An urchin's mischief ends his artful guile —
Alas, a viper stings the lad's bare knee;
And while we mourn — old Satan has his day.

LI

Observe the wisdom of the winging bee,
That wanders in a labyrinth, ablaze
With healthful blooms of balmy summer days,
And garners stores against adversity:

She gives no credit to Philosophy,
Who feebly falters in a tangled maze
Of sounding words, — addressed divergent ways
To life or death, as either case may be:

For, though each morning — when the sun awakes
The drowsy world again to diligence —
Brings her that closer to eternal night,

She fails not, as the moments go, but takes
Rich toll of life, her own life's recompense,
And gains fair balance — till her last long flight.

LII

Far to the north where Arctic's cold, intense,
Sweeps over snowy ledges, glittering white,
The hunted silver-fox awaits the night,
Trusting his cunning to contrive defense:

Far to the south, in the green thickets dense,
The bird of paradise with dazzling flight,
Seeks to elude the trapper's eager sight, —
His gain her loss, her death his recompense.

For no necessity the beautiful
Are slaughtered by the cruel of great might. —
Beauty and virtue often lose the race. —

What subterfuge can circumvent that rule,
And give to them the gain of vested right,
By which the weak may win a doubtful case?

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

LIII

When through the breaking clouds the rainbow's light
Makes glad the valley at the mountain's base,
The drooping flowers renew their pretty grace,
And lift their petals, fresh with raindrops bright:

And soon it seems as if a wizard's might
Is working wonders with the rainbow's rays,
Which disappearing leave nor sign nor trace,
Save tiny birds that balance in swift flight:

Out of the rainbow they appear to spring,
And dart with humming sound among the
flowers,
And flash their splendour till the day is done:

So, when a lovely soul unfolds her wing,
Ah, must she hover in celestial bowers,
Only to vanish — in the vast unknown?

LIV

His pomp forgotten, couched on fragrant flowers,
Forever deaf to the discordant moan
Of his poor dwarf, now perched on his great
throne,
The Sultan lies in state in silken bowers.

The courtiers all have fled from the hushed towers,
And wait on his assassin; and alone
That witless jester wails, in monotone,
Fantastic songs, as on the throne he cowers:—

“Life is a pearl — in a deep ocean rolling —
Grant me but life and your pearls I want none;
Sultan and subject, all have a last day.

“Gauzy-winged pearl of a sultan go soulling —
Clown of his foolish fun stroll in the sun —
Sultan or zaney, the pearl rolls away.”

LV

Poised as a rapier glittering in the sun,
The deadly dragon-fly awaits his prey;
But near him a frail rosebud gives the day
Largess of life that she has briefly won:

Surely the canker-moth that rose must shun,
For like an old-time knight, as reckless and gay,
The valiant dragon-fly disputes the way —
Our gentle rosebud's witless champion.

A few short hours may span his might in war,
And, silent on the velvet-matted moss,
Dissolves to dust the short-lived dragon-fly:

And the limp rose, now leaning sadly o'er
Her fallen hero, covers him with loss
Of her own petals, — fragrant while they die.

LVI

How beautiful it seems when the soft gloss
Of summer evening on the tranquil plains
Falls gently from the moon, while jewelled
wains,
With light surrounding, follow her across

The darkening dome their flaming points emboss!
But while deceiving rays transform the stains
Of deadly contest, — and the sad remains
Of those who strove for life but gained its loss, —

While the charmed sight is ravished, far away
Come sounds abhorrent, — as if hell's woe
swells, —
From slinking jackals sobbing frightful mirth.

And those fair night-forms, when the glare of day
Again has poured in nooks of dells and fells,
Mortescient — crumble to the crumbling earth.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

LVII

All through the night the languid lily's bells
Sleep on the soft breeze, wafted in her glen,
But, quickened into new life, quiver when
The wakeful lark his happy matin swells:

And when the rising sun lights crystal wells,
And that sweet flower leans o'er the stream,
again
Adoring her Creator, is it in vain
That life is only where the Spirit dwells?

But, even as adoring worship fills
Her fragile being, from the town, near by,
An orphan finds and plucks — the lily's doom:

And torn from her cool glen amid the hills,
To deck the sorrow of a grave, and die,
She sighs her life away — against the tomb.

LVIII

Ever the round world turns a gladdened eye
To worship her material God that swings
In golden splendour, and a splendour flings,
Life-giving, from the universal sky:

And ever as the joyous moments fly, —
Ah, whither on their rapid sun-made wings, —
The changing world turns from her God and
brings
Darkness intense to hide her Deity.

And, lo, our changing souls may worship now,
Persuaded in a God of blessed sway,
Sufficient to the need, benign to save;

But on the morrow stifle every vow,
No more submissive to that faith, and say,
The mystery of life — turns to the grave.

THE LOVER'S ROSARY

LIX

What, then, is left to grace our fitful day,
If at the last, to some vortexual cave,
Our exhalations, vanished from the grave,
Fade into nothing from dissolving clay?

Is there no path, no sure immortal way,
To lead this spirit, that the Spirit gave,
Over the marge of Death's Leathean wave,
That Time may gain what Time has snatched
away?

Ah, whether man must vanish; or his fitting soul
Die never; or, as evolutions roll
Tremendous cycles, he achieve his goal —

Absorption in the One Omnipotent —
How shall I know? Till then let this Lament,
Immortal, be my living monument.



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